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*Seriousness of Attention at the
time of Divine Worship.*

Earnestly Recommended in a

SERMON

Preach'd in the

PARISH CHURCH

OF

St. *M I C H A E L S*

AT THE

Pleas in Norwich.

By THOMAS CLAYTON Rector of the
said Parish.

L O N D O N:

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Services of the National Anthem
and of the Lord's Prayer

SERMON

PARTIAL CHURCH

SE. W. C. W. L. A.

Place in the Church

By the Order of the Board of the
the Church

Printed by W. A. L. & Co.
the Church

To my worthy Friends the
Parishioners of the Parish
of *St. Michael* at the *Pleas*
in *Norwich*.

THIS Discourse appearing abroad
without any publick Request,
makes it seem necessary for me to give
some reason for my publishing of it. And
the best, and only one indeed, which I
can offer is this, that when I preach'd
it, several Persons out of their abundant
Candour, were pleas'd to own to me they
had receiv'd some Benefit by it; and
were earnest with me to make it publick,
as hoping it might have the like good
effect on others. If it be so fortunate
as to meet with this good Success, I can
freely bear the Censures it is upon other
accounts justly expos'd to.

In the licentious Age we now live, it
is notorious that Piety runs low; That

EPISTLE DEDICATORY.

the Service of God is much neglected; and when perform'd, too too often done by many with such Indifferency and Misbehaviour, as if they came to Church more out of Levity and Diversion, than to pay their Homage and Devotion to Almighty God.

This being so generally our Case, I hope it will not be taken amiss, if I propose the most proper and effectual Remedy I could think of, to restore the Honour justly due to God and his Divine Worship. And would we apply our selves seriously to the several parts of it, as used in our Church, they are of such admirable Composure, both as to the Piety of the Matter, and the Propriety and Force of the Words by which it is express'd, that nothing but want of due Attention can make them fail of warming us with the Love of God, and the Sense of our greatest Obligations to him.

I would not have it thought, that You of this Parish have need of an Admonition

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tion to this Purpose more than others; for I must here do You the Justice to own, (and 'tis with a great deal of Satisfaction too) that Your Appearance upon all publick Occasions is as frequent, and Your Behaviour as regular, as any of Your Neighbours, tho' at the same time we must acknowledge we are all of us wanting in our Duty.

Neither ought I upon this Occasion to pass by that Zeal and Respect, which You of late Years (more especially) have shewn to the Honour of God, by those frequent and large Expences You have been at in the beautifying and adorning of his House, even at a Time when the publick Taxes have run so high, and Trade as low. These things are very commendable and Praise-worthy; when they proceed out of a Principle of Love, and true Respect to God.

And therefore to excite and stir You up to so holy a Disposition of Mind, I humbly present this following Discourse to Your

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serious perusal, most heartily begging the Blessing of Almighty God, that what is here sincerely offered for the Advancement of his Honour and Glory, may at the same time help us all forward in the great Work of our Salvation; which by the Grace of God shall be the daily Care, as it is now the earnest Prayer, of

Your most obliged,

tho' unworthy Pastor,

and humble Servant,

Nov. Dec. 6.

1711.

THO. CLAYTON.

ECCLE-

ECCLESIASTES V. I.

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God, and be more ready to hear than to give the Sacrifice of Fools : for they consider not that they do evil.

AMong the many excellent Rules for the Conduct of human Life, both with respect to this World, and that which is to come, there is no one of more Use and Advantage than that contained in the words of the Text : For, as the Apostle St. Paul directs us, *That in every thing by Prayer and Supplication, we should make our requests known unto God ;* so the Advice of the Wiseman here, is in order to make them acceptable to him, and successful to our selves. For it is not the matter of our Prayers, which alone will recommend our Wants effectually to God, but it is the manner also of addressing our selves to him, by the Humility of our Minds, and the Attention of our Hearts, which will render them available in his sight.

And therefore good reason was there for the Preacher to give this wise and pious Cau-

tion to all Persons, when they are about to pay their religious Worship unto God. *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the Sacrifice of Fools: for they consider not that they do evil.*

The word Foot in the Holy Scriptures is very often to be taken in a metaphorical sense; sometimes is to be understood by it the whole carriage of our Lives; as in the 119 Psalm 101 ver. *I have refrained my feet from every evil way, that I might keep thy word; (i. e.) I have kept my self from all Iniquity, that I might observe thy Commandments.* Sometimes it denotes Subjection to Authority and Power: Psalm 8. 6. Where holy David speaking of the Excellency and Power of Man, says, *Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands, thou hast put all things under his feet.* Again, in other places we are to understand by it, the Will, Affections, and Purposes of the Mind; As Prov. 4. 26. *Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established;* As much as to say, take care that your Will and Affections, and that the Purposes and Intentions of your Mind, be guided by the Laws of Reason and Religion. And in this sense I take the words of the Text, *Keep thy foot when thou goest to the House of God; (i. e.)* When thou goest into the Temple of the Lord, to offer up thy Prayers, as the Chaldee Paraphrase

phrase has it, or thy Sacrifices there, carry a Mind duly prepared for such solemn and religious Performances; and keep a strict Guard over thy Hearts, over thy Thoughts and Affections, that thou mayest behave thy self there with that Reverence and Attention, which is suitable to the place thou art in, and the business thou art about: And to this sense of the words do the generality of Interpreters agree. And therefore not to trouble you with any farther enquiries about them, I shall prosecute my Design from these following Particulars.

First, That as Decency of Behaviour in the outward part of our Worship is required, so no less, is Attention of Mind in the inward part expected from us.

Secondly, I shall consider wherein the Attention, and the Wandring of our Mind consist.

Thirdly, I shall set forth the Evil and Sinfulness of a wandring Mind, at our solemn and religious Exercises.

Fourthly, I shall shew some Reasons why we ought to be very careful at our Devotions, to shut out as far as we are able all sensual worldly Thoughts, and to fix our Minds upon God and heavenly things.

And *Lastly*, in order to so good a Regulation of our selves, I shall offer some Rules and Directions, which may be useful to keep our Minds attent and fix'd upon our Business at such times.

First,

First, I shall shew, that as Decency of Behaviour in the outward part of our religious Worship is required, so no less is Attention of Mind, in the inward part, expected from us.

The Worship of God by some external Rites and Ceremonies, is very near as antient as the Being of Mankind: And tho' we do not read of any Sacrifices offered up by *Adam*, yet we find Oblations made by him who was next in Descent from him, and so continued down to the Patriarchs, and their succeeding Generations. And this sort of religious Worship by the offering up of Sacrifices, was so universally propagated to, if not implanted in, all Mankind, that we hardly read of any Nation, tho' never so barbarous, but what in some kind or other made use of it.

And, when Almighty God was pleased to give a more express and particular System of Divine Laws unto his People the *Jews*, he digested them into a Body of external Rites and Ceremonies, suitable to their present Capacities, and the Circumstances they were under. And tho' at the times and places of their religious Assemblies, he expected they should be strict in the performance of his several Institutions, and as to their outward Carriage, behave themselves with all the Decency and Reverence imaginable; yet, did he as well expect and require the Attention
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of their Minds, that their Souls as well as Bodies should be a lively Sacrifice unto him. *Give me thy heart,* says Solomon, (who was an inspir'd Writer) *and let thine eyes observe my ways:* For otherwise they would but offer the Sacrifice of Fools, neither honour God, nor profit their own selves. And that we may be well assured of the Unprofitableness of such Services, let us hear what God farther declares by his Prophet, *Isa. 29. 13. Wherefore the Lord said, forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their hearts far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men: therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work against this people*—that is, by shewing his highest resentment of such contempt and ill usage of him. For what can be more provoking? What more dishonourable to God, than to make a formal appearance of paying Homage and Adoration to him, in our outward Worship, at the same time withdrawing our Heart and Affections from him, and devoting them, which are our better part, to the Service of the Devil and our corrupt Lusts? And, if God look'd for so much of the Soul and Affections of the Mind from this People the Jews, whose Heads must be very much taken up about their many various Modes of Worship, he may well expect a much greater Attention and Fixedness of Mind, from us Christians,

stians, whose Worship being freed from such numerous Rites, ought to be abundantly more spiritual. And if we consult our Saviour's Discourse with the Woman of *Samaria*, we may see he do's accordingly expect it should. For, says our Blessed Lord, *John 4. 23. The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.* And how can we worship him in Spirit and in Truth, if we do not at the time of our Devotions lift up, and fix our Hearts and Affections on him? There have been some groundless Interpretations of this place just mention'd; as if it prescrib'd to the state of the Gospel so spiritual a Worship, as even to exclude all material Buildings, for God's House: But our Blessed Lord (who is always consistent with himself) do's manifestly confute this Construction of the Words. For we read in *Mark 11.* how he express'd himself with great Indignation against those who prophan'd the Temple, altho' it was that part which was appropriated to the *Gentiles*. For so it is said, *ver. 15. that Jesus went into the Temple, and began to cast out them that sold, and bought in the Temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold Doves.* And in the *17. vers.* he gives the reason of it, *Is it not written, my house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer,* or rather to all Nations; as the Lear-
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ned Mr. *Mede* argues, (*i. e.*) “ In whatever
“ part of the World, any Place, or House,
“ shall be separated to God's religious Wor-
“ ship, it thereby obtains a relative Holiness,
and consequently claims from all Persons a
suitable Respect and Reverence. And per-
suant to this Interpretation, God do's expect
at our solemn and religious Assemblies, that
we should use such Rites and Ceremonies, as
are decent and becoming the God of Order:
for so the Apostle, who spoke by the Spirit
of God, commanded, when he directed the
Corinthians how they should manage them-
selves in their publick Assemblies: *Let all
things be done decently and in order*, 1 Cor.
14. 40. for it is hardly, if at all possible, to
perform any Divine Worship, such at least as
will be acceptable to the God of Order, with-
out such a regulation as is before mention'd.
And God not having set out to us by his re-
vealed Will any particular form or manner
of Worship, we may fairly conclude, he has
left it to the Appointment of the Governors
of the Church; and has also established their
Authority for so doing by a Divine Law; en-
joining us *to submit to every ordinance of man
for the Lord's sake.*

But then, this outward Behaviour in our
Worship, whether, by the different Gestures
of our Body, or the several Rites and Ce-
remonies made use of in it, must all point at,
and be subservient to the inward Fervour of
our

our Mind, so as to raise our Thoughts and Affections unto God, and to fix them closely upon him, to whom alone all our Devotions ought to be directed. For how lame a Sacrifice will it be, and unbecoming the Majesty of Heaven, for any one to present to God his Body, which alone is but a mere Carcass, and at the same time to offer up his Soul, his Heart and Affections, which are by far the better part, to the World, and to his sinful Lusts? This must certainly be offering the Sacrifice of Fools, it being no ways suitable to the Dignity of Man's Nature, or the Excellency of God's.

And, having thus shown that as Decency of Behaviour in the external, so Attention of Mind in the internal part of Worship is required of us, I proceed,

Secondly, To consider, wherein the Attention and Wandring of our Mind consist.

And to do this the more methodically, we may first reflect upon the Composition of our Nature, that it is made up of two different Parts, Soul and Body, as we are told in the Scriptures, *the Flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit lusteth against the Flesh*; and that we are here plac'd in a World, where Variety of Objects do continually beset us. And then secondly, we may consider how much our Soul is influenced by our Body, as the wise Man observes, *the corruptible Body presseth*

presseth down the Soul, and the earthly Tabernacle weigheth down the Mind that miseth upon many things; upon which Account Thoughts are wont to arise in us, according to our natural Temper and Complexion. And again, when we consider the Power and Malice of our Adversary the Devil, how watchful and ready he is upon all Occasions to suggest evil Thoughts into our Minds: I say, when we put all these things together, it will appear no wonder (it's rather to be expected) that our Minds should be often flitting from one thing to another, and that our Thoughts should make frequent Excursions. For in the State and Condition we are here, it hardly can be otherwise: And there is no harm in all this, provided we go no farther; for I don't look upon it to be in our Power to prevent the first Motions of our Thoughts, or that they are sinful, so far as they are natural to us. Such shifting of our Thoughts serves to encrease our Knowledge; it is an Exercise of our Faculties, no less improving than entertaining. And thus we may think on several Matters, go from one thing to another, without any culpable Levity, where no special Reason otherwise requires.

But here I take the Attention and Wandering of our Mind (with respect to the Subject I'm upon) to lie, that when our Thoughts should be wholly employ'd about some one thing,

thing, we either fix them on it, or suffer them to rove after a great many other Objects: If we keep our Thoughts close about the Matter we are engaged in, this may properly be said to be Attention; but if we give them their Liberty, and suffer them to range after things of another Nature, this is the Wandring of the Mind. So that for the purpose, in the Worship of God, the Wandring or Distraction of our Mind may be said to be two-fold: First, as it is the Act of our Will, and then without question it is a Sin: And, secondly, as it is the Effect of the Temper and Constitution of our Body; and then I no less doubt, but if striven against, it will be accounted by Almighty God as only a pityable Infirmary.

But I am afraid, if with an impartial Eye we look into our Behaviour at the time of Divine Worship, we shall find it the Case of too many of us, that when our Minds should be taken up about God and Heaven, and the things of another World, when we should be deeply affected with the Sense of our manifold Sins and Provocations, and with all the Earnestness imaginable, be suing to Heaven for the Pardon and Forgiveness of them; I say, when our Thoughts should be fixed on such things as these, we are instead of this, letting loose our Minds after the things of this World, and seeking out for that which may divert us from our present Duty; this,
or

or that Project to encrease our Substance; or advance our Honour; how to carry on our Trade, or manage any Bargain we have in Hand; some Assignment, Diversion, or Entertainment; recollecting our past mispent Pleasures, or contriving new ones to delight us with; and a great many such carnal worldly Thoughts Men are wont to call into their Minds, when they should be wholly employ'd in offering up their Prayers to God, and hearing some Portion of his Word. And whatever mean Opinion some in this corrupt Age may have of Preaching, they ought to consider there are two very useful Ends of it; one to inform those that do not know their Duty, and the other to remind those that do of the Practice of it; and being an Ordinance of God's own Appointment, they may reasonably expect a more than ordinary Blessing from it. But, so careful are some, that their Minds may not even by Chance attend upon the Affairs of Religion, that they are resolved to put a stop to the Entercourse, by suffering their Eyes and Tongues to give an Interruption to them; as if the Devil and their own corrupt Nature were not able enough of themselves to divert their Thoughts from holy Things. It is a Fault indeed, and no small one too, to draw nigh to God with our Lips and not our Hearts, as being chargeable with Carelessness at least, if not Hypocrisie: But in the Church of God, and at

the time of Divine Service, to offer neither Lips nor Heart, what can this be look'd upon but as an open Affront to, and Contempt of the Divine Majesty? Certainly, did Men consider the Place they are in, and how solemn and important a Business they are about, they would take more Care to express their Reverence and Respect, and not make the Temple of the Lord, like the Amphi-Theatres of the Heathens of old, serve only for the Diversion of the Company, and the Entertainment of Spectators. The things we Christians pray for are chiefly of a spiritual Nature, such as the Pardon of our Sins, the Graces of God's holy Spirit, and the Joys and Comforts of another Life; and therefore our Mind and Spirit, our whole Soul and Affections, ought to be closely fix'd upon them. And this is what we promise in the Office of our Communion, when we declare in these following Words, *That here we offer and present unto thee; O Lord, our selves, our Souls and Bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively Sacrifice unto thee:* where we are to take notice that this is not spoken with relation only to the present Time, and the Office of the Communion, but that we promise also to do it for the future, upon all Occasions of the like Nature; for to this purpose are our Vows and Engagements at the Lord's Supper. But how is this consistent with that Wandring of Mind which a great many allow themselves in,

in, and are so far from striving against, that 'tis to be feared they too often seek out for worldly sensual Thoughts, and then indulge them with Pleasure and Delight? This indeed is presenting God the Body, but it's not a reasonable, and consequently it will not be an acceptable Sacrifice unto him.

But as this Wandering of our Mind in the time of Divine Worship, by being indulg'd, persu'd, and not resisted, becomes criminal, as being wilful in us; so there may be a Wandering of our Thoughts, when we may reasonably hope it will be accounted no more than a Misfortune to us, as being rather the Result of our natural Infirmary than of our Choice. Our busy Enemy is ever active with us, but more especially, and more vigorously when we are immediately employed in God's Service. The Abuse of the best things is the worst of Corruptions; and therefore, if he can prevent our Prayers from being acceptable to God, he well knows they will be an Abomination in his Sight.

But farther, the Temper and Complexion of Men's Bodies, the Disorder and irregular Motions in their Blood and Spirits, the Troubles and Misfortunes of the World, and a great many other Infirmities incident to Mankind, do very much promote the Wandering and Distraction of the Mind. So that what from inward, as well as outward Causes, no question but a great many good and pious

Persons have frequent Interruptions of their Thoughts in the time of their Devotions: and yet we may (I hope) fairly conclude, that a general Repentance will be available for them, if heartily striven against; they being rather Sins of Weakness and Infirmary than of the Will and Choice.

And therefore, they who find themselves under this Misfortune, namely, that their Minds when they should be attent upon holy things are wandering after those of this World, may easily distinguish whether it be a Sin in them or no, by this Rule. If they are conscious when they find their Minds going astray from what they ought to be intent and fixt upon, that it was not with their Approbation or Consent; and that when they perceiv'd it, they forthwith oppos'd and resisted it, by calling back their Thoughts to their proper Business: If they find it thus with them, they may then rest satisfyed, that these Deviations from their Duty being either from the evil Suggestions of our common Enemy the Devil, or the Effect of their Constitution and bodily Infirmities, a merciful God will make a most gracious Allowance for them. For St. Paul tells us (who had Authority enough to declare it) *that if there be first a willing Mind, it is accepted according to what a Man hath, and not according to what he hath not.*

And let this be Matter of Comfort also, to those

those who are truly religious and devout, and are wont to endeavour all they can to raise up their Hearts and Affections unto God, and yet after all are apt to be cast down, and to have ill Thoughts of their Condition, because they do not feel such Briskness and Chearfulness of Spirit as they could wish for when they are about holy things: for this may be ascrib'd to a Cause, which is more their Misfortune than their Fault; and their ill Habit of Body, or some natural Weakness, may be more concern'd in't than their Mind. And God, who knows the Secrets of our Hearts, can judge whether they be sincere or not, and will accordingly as he finds, approve or condemn them.

To sum up then, in short, the State of the Case before us. If in our religious Worship we approach God's House with serious Purposes to be attentive at it, but when we are there, some sudden and improper Thoughts break in upon us, if as soon as we perceive it we pray and strive against them, endeavouring to recover our selves to a Steadiness of Mind, the Mercy of God, I question not, will warrant us to pronounce such Persons in a safe Condition, notwithstanding they may have some wandring Thoughts, which they heartily wish and endeavour to regulate.

But, if at such time, when we should be fixing our Minds upon the solemn Business

we come about, we wilfully call in sensual worldly Thoughts, or if such Thoughts darting in upon us of a sudden, we pursue, embrace, and delight in them, ^{is} this is certainly a Sin, *the Sacrifice of Fools, for they consider not that they do evil.*

Which was the *Third* thing I was to shew, (*viz.*) the Evil and Sinfulness of such a wandring Mind in the time of Divine Worship.

And that upon these two Accounts more especially.

First, Because it is a very great Slight and Contempt of the Divine Majesty.

Secondly, For that it is no small Scandal to the Christian Religion in general, and to our Church in particular.

First, The evil and sinfulness of a wandring Mind in the time of Divine Worship will appear, because it is a very great Slight and Contempt of the Divine Majesty.

It has been usually accounted irreverent and disrespectful, not to pay a due regard even to the very Name of God, when we hear it mention'd: Much more is it so, to come into his holy Temple (where he has declar'd himself to be more immediately present) on purpose (as is pretended at least) to worship and adore him, with Minds unpar'd for such serious Performances. For to appear before him in an humble Posture, as if we were imploring those things we want,
and

and praising him for the good things we have receiv'd, when at the same time we direct our Eyes and Hearts to the several Objects of our Folly and Diversion; How can it be look'd on otherwise than as a mock-piece of Service, and an open Affront to the great God of Heaven and Earth, who is arm'd with Power and Justice to revenge such publick Disrespect?

We are commanded by our Blessed Saviour *to love the Lord with all our Heart, with all our Soul, and with all our Strength*; and can there be a more proper time of expressing this our Love, than when we are attending at his House upon his holy Ordinances, to ask Forgiveness of our past Sins, to deprecate the Judgments they justly have deserv'd, to commemorate with Thankfulness the Mercies we have receiv'd, and to beg fresh Supplies of more? Certainly, if such Considerations as these, and at such a time, cannot be able to withdraw our Affections from sensual and worldly Pleasures, and to raise them with Delight and Satisfaction towards God and heavenly things; I say, if such Motives as these cannot have this good effect upon us, we may justly conclude, that we have not that Sense and Love of God and Religion which we ought to have. And how unhappy a condition is it, to be without the Love of God dwelling in us, which must be the Spring and Motive of all our good Deeds, since without it, not any thing that we can do will be acceptable to him?

Secondly, The Sin and Evil of suffering our Thoughts to go astray in the time of Divine Worship will appear, in that it is no small Scandal to the Christian Religion in general, and to our Church in particular. For should any *Jew*, or Heathen, or any other Adversary to Christianity come into our Places of religious Worship, and there behold the careless Behaviour of too many in the several instances of Levity and Indecency, too obvious to every Observer, and but few so intent upon their Duty as they ought; they would be apt to look upon our Service as a mere outside shew, and think that our Hearts and Affections are elsewhere engag'd, while God is served with the mere Presence of a Carcass; for no more is the Body when the Mind is parted from it. And is it not a great Disparagement, that many Heathens should be more fervent in their Devotions, even to mere Idols, than a great many of us Christians are to the living God? Thus far the Mischief of not *attending* affects our Religion in general.

But then the Wandring and Distraction of our Mind, so far at least as is visible, do's give some Plea to the Members of that Church which makes use of Images, to stay and fix their Minds upon. And tho' I do not think they have any grounds, or can make any good defence for such a Practice; (especially considering what Abuses and Corruptions have risen from it) yet the want of our due Attention will but strengthen

strengthen them in their Opinion; and the best Argument we can urge against it is, to shew there is no occasion for such helps as they pretend are necessary.

Again, By the Wandering of our Minds at the Service of God, we fortify the Arguments of our Dissenters, against our Liturgy and Common Prayer; for one which they very much insist on is, that it flattens and deadens our Devotion. Now tho' a Form of Prayer is more edifying, and much more effectual, to fix our Thoughts on God and the Duty we are about, as has been prov'd almost to a Demonstration by a late Learned and Pious Prelate; yet if it do's not produce this good effect in us, the World (I mean the common sort of People especially) will be prevail'd on rather to believe what they see is matter of Fact, than to hearken to the Reasons we can offer for the nature of the thing. And therefore if we have any regard, first to the Honour and Glory of God, and the Christian Institution of which we profess our selves to be Members; and next to the Church of *England*, into whose Communion it is our Safety and Happiness to be admitted; we ought all of us to behave our selves with such Attention and Fixedness of Mind, as may enable us to silence the Objections of our Adversaries of either sort, and to vindicate our Liturgy from those false Aspersions they are wont to cast upon it. And if we do not take

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this care, I don't see how we can get off the Charge of giving occasion of Scandal to them, which will not a little aggravate that Fault, which is so blameable in us without it. And thus I have endeavour'd to shew wherein the Attention and Wandring of our Mind consist, and withal prov'd the Evil and Sefulness of the latter, in the time of Divine Worship.

I shall now in the *Fourth* Place shew some Reasons, why we ought at such times to keep our Minds attent and fix'd upon the Business we are about. And tho' I might here alledge several, I shall urge but two; which, if duly consider'd, have weight enough to excite us to the diligent Practice of this Duty.

There needs, 'tis true, no other Argument than what has been already alledg'd, to engage us to worship God with Soul as well as Body, because it is a Sin and Evil, as the Text declares, to do otherwise. But I shall consider farther why we ought to do it.

First, Upon the account that it is the Attention of our Minds that gives Life and Efficacy to our Prayers, and without it we frustrate the very End and Design of them.

It has been ever esteem'd one of the greatest Blessings belonging to Mankind, that we poor shiftless Creatures may have recourse unto Almighty God by Prayer and Supplication, who has promised to supply us with what we want, and is convenient for us. And if we consult the holy Scriptures we may there
read

read what mighty things have been done by Prayer, as also what may now be expected from a due Application to this Duty. But if at our Devotions we do not offer up our Soul and Affections unto God, but wilfully suffer them to wander after worldly things, we thereby deprive our selves of the Benefits of our Prayers, and offer nothing better unto God than *the Sacrifice of Fools*; and accordingly must expect they will return empty to us. For can we imagine God should regard those Prayers, which we do not mind our selves?

Secondly, We ought not to suffer our Minds to go astray after sensual worldly Thoughts, when they should be intent upon God, and things of a spiritual Nature, because by so doing, we not only commit a great Offence at present, but it is also the readiest way to lead us into all manner of Sin and Wickedness for the future, and that both *morally* and *naturally*. First *morally*, because 'tis by our acceptable Prayers unto God that we are more immediately under the Protection of his Divine Providence; 'tis by our earnest Prayers that the Graces of the Blessed Spirit are conveyed to us, and kept alive in us, whereby we are enabled to resist and overcome the Temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil. Now if the Vertue and Efficacy of our Prayers be taken off, for want of due Attention at the offering of them, we shall, by way

way of Punishment, be left to struggle with those powerful Enemies aforementioned, who will be too strong for us without the help and assistance of God's Holy Spirit.

So also, unless our Prayers be rightly qualified by the steadiness of our Minds at the presenting of them, we shall be apt to fall *naturally* into divers kinds of Sin. For he who will not keep a due guard upon himself, when he is in the immediate Presence of Almighty God, and about the most serious and important Business of his Life; but will even then venture to sin afresh, when he should be begging pardon for the Offences he has already committed: I say, he that will act with such Defiance against God at such times, what is to be expected from him, when this Awe shall be taken off, and these Restraints remov'd, but that he should the more freely indulge his own corrupt Lusts and sinful Inclinations? Whereas, he that with fervour of Mind, and ardency of Spirit addresses himself to God, and is deeply affected at his Devotions, with the sense of the Divine Bounty and his own Unworthiness, that Man will of course become more careful of his whole Behaviour at all other times and places.

And thus having shewn the nature of a wandering Mind, its evil and sinfulness, together with the reasons for avoiding it; I shall in the *Fifth* and *Last* Place, by way of Assistance to our honest Endeavours against it, offer

offer these following Directions, and among a great many, I shall mention but some few, that we may remember them the better.

First, In order to keep our Minds fix'd and steady at the Service of God, we should do well to get our Hearts in tune for so spiritual an Exercise a little before, at least as soon, as we enter into Church, and not to rush into the Temple of the Lord, as we would do into any common place. *Keep thy foot* (says the Wiseman) *when thou goest into the house of God*: And if we would reflect upon the Majesty of the great Creator of the World, who more immediately resides there, as also the importance of that Business we go about, no less than our immortal Happiness or Misery being concerned in it: if we would farther consider, that we are going thither to confess our Sins unto Almighty God, and to beg his Pardon for them, together with his Divine Assistance for the time to come; such Reflections as these before we enter upon our Devotions, must needs strike an Awe and Dread into us, and mightily conduce to settle our Thoughts to a serious Application to the matter we are about.

Again, It will be very expedient to prevent our Minds going astray, that we suffer at such times our Eyes to wander as little as may be, and that we keep them under a strict guard: for these are the Inlets to our Hearts, and therefore a due restraint of them will prevent our
Minds

Minds from being distracted with that variety of Objects which are round about us. But by giving them a liberty to the gratifying our Curiosity, or what is worse, our sinful Appetites, we unavoidably interrupt the course of our Attention, and turn our Service into *the Sacrifice of Fools*.

Thirdly, It will not be amiss, in order to keep our Mind steady at our Devotions, that we repeat the Prayers (not loudly to the disturbance of the Congregation, as the manner of some is, but) softly to our selves: for the Mind of Man cannot attend to many things at once; and therefore if it be taken up in speaking jointly with the Minister, it may in a great measure hinder our Thoughts from roving after other things. This is a Rule that may be usefully followed as we find occasion.

Fourthly, We should take Care at the time of Divine Worship, whenever we perceive our Thoughts to wander and go astray, forthwith to recal, and fix them upon the Matter we have in Hand. I have said before, that considering the strict Alliance there is between our Soul and Body, and the mutual Dependence upon each other, and withal how busy our Adversary the Devil is to dart evil Thoughts into us, it is not to be expected we should prevent these sudden first Motions of our Minds. But then thus far it is in our Power, (assisted by the Grace of God)

not to give our Assent to them, nor to pursue them with Pleasure and Delight; for if we do, such Compliance makes them our own, and us answerable for them. And therefore whenever we perceive our Thoughts stepping out of the way, we must be careful instantly to recover and direct them to the Object of our Worship: And if we be thus sincere in our Endeavours to fix our Minds upon Almighty God, he will graciously make allowance for such our Infirmities, and not suffer them to rise up in Judgment against us at another Day.

I can't here omit to recommend, and that with some Earnestness, to the better sort, especially to those of higher Stations, that They would distinguish themselves by an exemplary Stedfastness of Attention, and make it observable to others; that They, by the Decency and Reverence of their outward Gesture, would express the Fervour and Ardency of their Minds. For by so doing the inferior sort, who are wont to be influenced by the Example of those above them, may have their Zeal kindled by beholding the Seriousness of their Devotions: and by this means They will not only glorify God themselves, but also propagate his Honour throughout all the Congregation.

To conclude: Let us every one from the highest to the lowest, (for 'tis the Duty of us all when we are before God in his holy Temple)

Temple) offer up our Souls as well as Bodies; for they must be join'd together to make a reasonable, holy and acceptable Sacrifice. Let us, at such times, withdraw our Thoughts and Affections from worldly carnal things, and lift them up to God; that we may say with holy David, *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed, I will sing and give praise unto the best member that I have.*

To which end let us often pray in the words of our most excellent Church, *Almighty God, who see'st that we have no power of our selves to help our selves, keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls, that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

And Reverence of their outward Gesture, would express the Fervour and Ardency of their Minds. For by doing the inferior part, who are wont to be influenced by the Examine of those above them, may have their Zeal kindled by beholding the Seriousness of their Devotions: and by this means they will not only glorify God themselves, but also propagate his Honour throughout all the Congregation.

FINIS.

To conclude: Let us every one from the highest to the lowest, (for 'tis the Duty of us all when we are before God in his holy Temple)